

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 06685 301722Z

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1271

INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST

UNCLAS LONDON 06685

FOR EUR/EX N. BASKEY

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ALOW UK

SUBJECT: HARDSHIP DIFFERENTIAL IN BELFAST

1. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS DEPARTMENT IS CONTEMPLATING REDUCTION OF HARDSHIP DIFFERENTIAL IN BELFAST. WE ARE SOMEWHAT DISMAYED AT THIS PROSPECT BECAUSE ALL EVIDENCE INDICATES CONDITIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE BECOME WORSE OVER LAST SEVERAL YEARS SINCE HARDSHIP ALLOWANCE ORIGINALLY INSTITUTED IN 1972.

2. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT PREVAILING LIVING CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT AND ISOLATION ARE SO ADVERSE IN BELFAST,

THAT IT WOULD BE UNWISE AT THIS TIME TO MAKE SUCH A MOVE WITHOUT ALL THE FACTS BEING REAPPRAISED AND PROPERLY EVALUATED.

3. ALTHOUGH ONLY TWO AMERICAN OFFICERS WITH THEIR FAMILIES ARE PRESENTLY ASSIGNED TO THIS KEY POST, EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT, IN FUTURE, DEPARTMENT MIGHT ENCOUNTER SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES IN PERSUADING OFFICERS' FAMILIES TO TAKE SUCH ASSIGNMENTS UNDER EXISTING CONDITIONS WITH OR WITHOUT HARDSHIP DIFFERENTIAL.

UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 02 LONDON 06685 301722Z

4. FOLLOWING ARE RANDOM EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENT IN

BELFAST WHICH IS ONE OF FEAR, DANGER, ISOLATION, AND CONSTANT THREAT TO LIFE AND PROPERTY:

A. THE DEATH RATE, AS RESULT OF TERRORISM, IS AT ITS HIGHEST AND CONTINUES TO INCREASE. THIS WAS REPORTED AS RECENTLY AS APRIL 27 IN BELFAST 158.

B. EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE VIRTUALLY NO RECREATIONAL OUTLETS SINCE MOVIES, THEATERS, RESTAURANTS AND EVEN CHURCHES ARE TARGETS OF TERRORIST BOMBERS.

C. ONLY SAFE RECREATIONAL AREAS ARE OUTSIDE NORTHERN IRELAND WHICH, OF COURSE, ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE TO EMPLOYEES AND FAMILIES UNLESS THEY ABSENT THEMSELVES FROM POST.

D. TAXIS AND BUSES NO LONGER OPERATE AFTER DARK. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION DURING DAYLIGHT AND EVEN TRAINS TO DUBLIN HAVE BEEN SUBJECTS OF TERRORISTS ATTACKS 14 TIMES IN LAST YEAR.

E. WITHIN LAST MONTH AUTHORITIES BUILT NEW SECURITY PERIMETER ENCLOSURE SURROUNDING THE CENTER OF BELFAST. WITHIN ONE WEEK, FIVE BOMBS EXPLODED IN THIS THOUGHT-TO-BE SAFE AREA. INCIDENTALLY, THIS IS AREA WHERE CONSULATE IS LOCATED. CONSULATE GENERAL, AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY DAMAGED BY TERRORIST BOMBINGS IN THE PAST.

F. CHILDREN OF CONSUL RANGING IN AGES 10 TO 14 YEARS MUST BE TAKEN EVERYWHERE BY CAR, AS EVEN STREETS ARE UNSAFE BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE ATTACK BY ROVING BANDS OF PARTISAN GANGS.

G. ALL MAJOR HOTELS HAVE BEEN BOMBED MANY TIMES

AND ARE CURRENTLY CLOSED TO PUBLIC. IN FACT, TWO OF THE PRINCIPAL HOTELS WHICH ARE VERY HEAVILY GUARDED AND HAD NOT BEEN PREVIOUSLY HIT WERE BOMBED IN THE LAST MONTH.

H. ANY ENTERTAINMENT IN BELFAST MUST BE DONE IN-DOORS AND UNDER HEAVY GUARD WITH USUALLY SOME OF THE GUESTS ARRIVING WITH BODY GUARDS WHICH NOT ONLY ADDS TO THE TENSION BUT INCREASES COST OF THE FUNCTION.

5. IF THE DEPARTMENT IS DETERMINED TO MAKE A REDUCTION
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PAGE 03 LONDON 06685 301722Z

IN HARDSHIP DIFFERENTIAL FOR BELFAST, WE URGE THAT THIS BE DEFERRED UNTIL A NEW ON-SITE SURVEY CAN BE CARRIED OUT BY THE FOREIGN SERVICE INSPECTORS WHO ARE SCHEDULED TO VISIT BELFAST FROM JUNE 30 TO JULY 2.

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